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## John Calvin as an Expositor

J.L.M. Haire

### His achievement

It is right, in giving any account of John Calvin as an expositor, to begin with an unequivocal acknowledgement of the greatness of his contribution. He did two things of the highest value for the whole Church. He aimed at setting out the plain meaning of Scripture with clarity and brevity and, secondly, he recognized that Scripture is basically witness to God's power and grace. Consequently all who come after him can consult him with profit, as they try to grasp the exact meaning of the Biblical writers and they can profitably listen to the insights he gained into the message which the writers were presenting. He is, of course, like all men a man of his time. He is a Renaissance scholar, very interested in the discoveries of science (as we shall see) and, as a literary man of the Renaissance, he is also interested in and aware of the differences in style of the Biblical writers. Thus he has no doubt that another than the apostle Paul wrote the epistle to the Hebrews or that 2 Peter was written by some one other than the apostle. In his view an amanuensis was given a free hand and so said things which were phrased in a way the apostle would not have done e.g. on 2 Peter 3.16 he declares that "Peter himself would never have spoken thus". Equally he is a man of his time in assuming that the prophet Isaiah spoke not only of the past and present but, in chs 40-66, of future events centuries ahead after the exile. Daniel, too, spoke of the future acts of Alexander the Great. And no less as a man of his time and not surprisingly he strikes a strong polemical note, not only both in prefaces and texts against the Papacy, but also against the Lutheran interpretation of the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper (e.g., in his dedication to Frederick of his commentary on Jeremiah, or in his dedication to Edward VI of England of his commentary on the Catholic Epistles) .

His achievement as expositor was recognized in the next generation by Richard Hooker in England and in the next century by the man most critical of his predestination



doctrine, Arminius himself, and by many writers nearer our time. Their high regard for his work has been recorded at the close of the English edition of a commentary on Joshua. Of these Bishop Wilson is a good example. Hooker said that "the sense of Scripture which Calvin alloweth" was considered in the Anglican Church to be of more force than if "ten thousand Augustines, Jeromes, Chrysostoms, Cyrprians were brought forth" (quoted in A. Mitchell Hunter, The Teaching of Calvin, pp21-22). Arminius wrote, "After the Holy Scriptures I exhort the students to read the commentaries of Calvin; for I tell them that he is incomparable in the Interpretation of Scripture" (ibid p19) and Bishop Wilson's words are "Calvin's commentaries remain, after three centuries, unparalleled for force of mind, justness in exposition, and practical views." (Calvin, Commentary on Joshua p403)

### The Commentaries

Calvin's first published commentary was, not unnaturally, an exposition of the epistle to the Romans, finished during his exile in Strasbourg (1539). This was followed, after his return and establishment in Geneva, by the other Pauline letters and then by the remaining NT epistles (except 2 and 3 John), and next his commentary on St. John and the harmony of Matthew, Mark and Luke. He almost certainly did not write a commentary on the Book of Revelation, though the tradition that he spoke disparagingly of it rests on a secondary source whose reliability T.H.L.Parker has questioned (Calvin's NT commentaries, pp75-78). The full list of dates are Romans 1539AD, Corinthians 1547, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and the Pastoral Epistles 1548-49, Hebrews, Thessalonians and James 1549-50; the Catholic Epistles 1551, Acts 1552, John's Gospel and the Harmony 1553. When one reflects how, nowadays, it takes a scholar often years to produce a commentary on a single book, one marvels at this rapid production. Moreover, every single verse is expounded and its individual words often examined and compared with their use elsewhere.

We marvel, too, when we remember that he is no scholar giving his whole life to exposition and teaching, but someone who is at the same time a great systematic theologian, producing his Institutes in various editions, and an ecclesiastical statesman with a vast correspondence and many hours spent in consultation with leaders of the reform movement from all over Europe. Indeed he often could only snatch a few minutes to attend to the exposition before it was again interrupted (Mitchell Hunter, op.cit.1). Many of his lectures on Scripture, on which the latter commentaries were based, were delivered extempore on the basis of his vast knowledge of Scripture and his very accurate and tenacious memory.

It was first in 1551, the year in which he published his commentary on the Catholic Epistles, that he printed also his first OT commentary, that on Isaiah. This book is important in two ways. He is now more pressed for time and relies on his secretary to take down his lectures. These he then revises and in them applies the understanding of the relation of the OT to the NT which he sets out systematically in the Institutes (Book II, chs 10 and 11, on the similarity and difference between the two Testaments). About this I hope to say more later. On the conclusion of his NT commentaries, he published his work on Genesis in 1554, on the Psalms and Hosea in 1557 (taking a great deal of pains and himself, as he says in the preface, gaining a great deal spiritually from the Psalms), the remaining minor prophets in 1559, Daniel in 1561. He published Jeremiah and the harmony of the Pentateuch in 1563, the year before his death, when already a very sick man. During the same year, too, he expounded Joshua and the first twenty chapters of Ezekiel, at which point his health broke down. So far as the present writer can judge, these last commentaries are in no way less scholarly, detailed or spiritually profound than the earlier books. The latter two were published after his death. They, like the commentaries on Jeremiah, the Minor Prophets and Daniel, had been taken down by his skilled secretaries, Bude and Jonville, and, in the case of the first three, worked over by Calvin himself. While he did not live to write commentaries on the remaining books of the OT, he had preached a series of sermons on Job, 2 Samuel and 1 Kings (Mitchell Hunter p18; J.T. McNeill, History and Character of



Calvinism, p204).

Many volumes have dedications to someone of outstanding importance whose acceptance of the dedication helps to give the book public recognition, especially in realms now influenced by the Reformation. Thus volumes are dedicated to the young King Edward VI of England (Catholic Epistles and Isaiah) and the second edition of Isaiah to Elizabeth I on the year she came to the throne. Similar dedications are made to several of the great German princes and the kings of Poland and Sweden. Two volumes are dedicated to his own Town Council at Geneva and to the Councillors of Frankfurt who supported the Reformed Faith. The most interesting of all the prefaces is that to the book of Psalms in which he draws aside for once the veil, telling us of his own life and seeing in the Psalmist's experience of joy and suffering a great encouragement to him and his friends.

### His Method

In the preface to his first commentary in 1539, he sets out his ideal of what a commentary should be. Its chief quality should be "lucid brevity" - clarity and brevity. Paying high tribute to two predecessors in writing commentaries for the reform movement, Melancthon and Bucer, he notes how the former concentrated on the most important themes in a biblical book and did not, on many occasions, expound the individual passages, while Bucer, full of the new insights, tended not to confine himself to the exact subject in hand but drew in other related concepts. Calvin himself will seek to expound the text before him and bring out, if he can, its exact meaning. And this he succeeded in doing with such clarity and elegance as well as theological insight, that he became the guide to many who came after him.

As a renaissance scholar he used the wisdom of the Middle Ages to pursue his purpose. He chose a short passage, as for example Peter the Lombard had done and also the jurists in their comment on Justinian. He studied the words employed, examining their use by the same author elsewhere and by other authors, giving the historical background and explaining philosophical

concepts. This he had already done as a young man before he had joined the Reformation, in his commentary on Seneca's De Clementia (J.T. Neill, p105; T.H.L.Parker, op.cit., Ch.II). He then constantly applies it to the life of the Christian and to the controversies of the Reformation age, especially in his criticism of the Roman Catholic teaching, and to the ruthlessness of the authorities in their opposition to reformation. Here, however, he is more restrained than Luther in offering criticism which is directly connected with the text. Today we would often see the passage as pinpointing the errors of other bodies and not exclusively, principally, or even at all those of the current Roman Church. He is also, of course, opposed to allegorizing any passage whose literal meaning is what he believes the writer intends. As we shall see, he never uses allegorizing to evade an interpretation which is difficult or unacceptable to him, and expresses the opinion that even Saint Augustine indulged unnecessarily in this, e.g. on Ephesians 3.18. He writes, of course, in Latin, providing in some cases a French edition and offering, verse by verse, his own Latin translation. But his comments are on the Greek and Hebrew originals of which languages he had made himself master, first of the Greek and later of Hebrew. In his understanding of Greek he has been reckoned at points a better interpreter than the great Erasmus (Hunter, op.cit,p20), but he deliberately avoids any parade of learning.

#### Agreeing to differ

He recognizes that others within the reformed churches may differ from him in their interpretation of scripture and that, considering our human limitations, this is inevitable. Thus he writes in his preface to the commentary on Romans (xxvii), "We ever find that even those who have not been deficient in their zeal for piety nor in reverence and sobriety in handling the mysteries of God, have by no means agreed among themselves on every point; for God hath never favoured his servants with so great a benefit that they were all endued with a full and perfect knowledge of everything; and no doubt for this



end, that he might first keep them humble, and, secondly, render them disposed to cultivate brotherly intercourse". By this he means, I think, that they might be ready to learn from each other. He continues, "Since then, what would be very desirable cannot be expected in this life, that is, universal consent among us in the interpretation of scripture, we must endeavour not to be motivated by a craving after new interpretations or with the wish to undermine others' reputations or be moved by personal dislike of the others, or personal ambition, but write, as we do of necessity and the wish to edify, and so distinguish disputed points from the principal teaching of scripture on which we should be unanimous". Here is the very interesting and important conviction that we should be united on essentials and grant liberty of opinion elsewhere.

If he were living in the twentieth century, he would not object to interpretations of passages of scripture which differed from his interpretation, especially where we possess more accurate knowledge than was available to the men of his time. We possess older and more reliable manuscripts so that passages like 1 John 5.8 about the three that bear witness in heaven - which Calvin accepted as genuine - were already known in the next generation not to be found in the older and better manuscripts. Equally, he would gladly have accepted the new knowledge of Palestinian topography and of the Koine Greek provided by the papyri and not, as he was bound to do, use the classical authors as guides to the meaning in the NT of certain Greek words.

Again, he is for example puzzled by the Aramaic Maranatha in 1 Cor 16.22, taking it, along with the previous words, as a form of Jewish imprecation on those who are about to be excluded from salvation. Scholars today note that the last four chapters of 2 Corinthians appear much more severe than chapters 1 to 9 and suggest that such final chapters may well be the "severe" letter referred to in 2 Cor 2.3. Calvin, in whose time such a view had not been suggested, assumes that 1 Corinthians is the "severe letter". He seeks also to explain the difference within 2 Corinthians as being, first, Paul's gentle approach to attempt to win over the rebellious

church and the latter more severe words as a means to moving them to repent - an improbable solution.

When he writes his commentary on Matthew, Mark and Luke he follows Bucer, who himself went back to earlier times in setting the synoptics together. Each he sees as bearing witness in his own way and with his own emphases. Therefore he rejects Jerome's theory that Mark is a shortened form of Matthew. When the three differ from one another in detail, he considers that each naturally chooses out what seems to him central in an incident. Those healings which involve either one or two sufferers, are differently described because, in his view, either one evangelist wanted especially to concentrate on the case of the individual person like Bartimaeus, or mentioned two because he remembered the actual incident in detail. Such differences do not trouble Calvin. They are marginal. Similarly, when Matthew quotes Zechariah and attributes the saying to Jeremiah (Matt 27.9), it is a slip of memory which could happen to any human being and not important for the heart of the matter. Again, if Acts refers to a different place as the burial place of Jacob from that given in Genesis, this he considers may be a different Rabbinic tradition. As the lawyers say in another context "de minimis non curat lex". It is the essentials of the gospel which matter, something he had already said in his preface to the Romans.

### Systematic theology versus exegesis?

If then Calvin saw as inevitable different interpretations of detail among reliable teachers in the Church, how far did he acknowledge differences of doctrine, or did he feel that a perfect system of doctrine could be formulated. The Westminster Fathers hoped to set up "a platform of religion for all time". Would Calvin have believed this possible? He certainly wrote his Institutes - Institutio, as in the great Roman lawyers, meant simply "a summary" in Latin - to be a summary of the teaching of scripture and so a guide to the many who, in the Reformation age were, for the first time, seeking to read and understand the Scriptures for themselves. For such he was certain that some such guidance by those more qualified



was necessary (see Francois Wendel, Calvin, p148) Undoubtedly he had a strong desire to present the Scriptures as consistent and proclaiming one clear and life-giving gospel. This can be illustrated in his writings, both by general principles and by individual passages. Thus he writes a harmony of Matthew, Mark and Luke and, even more clearly in one of his last commentaries, a harmony of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, assuming a Mosaic authorship for most of the Pentateuch. Indeed, in this later commentary, he moves over from his usual practice of following the order of the text, to rearranging the material to a much greater extent than with the synoptics, and re-orders the Pentateuch under four heads:-

1. A preface on "the dignity" or authority of God's law
2. The moral laws within the framework of the Ten Commandments.
3. The ceremonial law as foreshadowing the salvation in Christ and, with this, those political laws which belong to a particular time and place in ancient Israel and thus not to be made simpliciter the laws for modern states. As may be familiar, he sees the fourth commandment as only a law for the Jews before the Incarnation.
4. Finally, he collects those passages which he considers to be the application of the law to our time and place. This he calls "the end and use of the law" (See Harmony of the Pentateuch, I, pp xvi-xvii)

But such harmonizing is not for him a universal principle. He recognizes the great difference between the Synoptics and John, the former providing the account of the fulfilment of the OT in Christ, while John will present Christ's power and the results of his coming (Harmony, xxxvii).

We see his desire to make scripture fit into the pattern of doctrine, especially in those passages which seem to teach a different theology. Honest scholar that he is, he does not bypass the difficulties. Let us take two examples: baptism for the dead in 1 Cor 15.4

and the preaching to the imprisoned spirits in 1 Peter 3.19ff. In 1 Cor 15 he rejects the view that St Paul is referring to the practice of baptizing on behalf of those who have already died. This he holds would have been a superstition which the apostle would have violently rejected. He does not consider the possibility that this is simply an argumentum ad hominem, which would argue, "You Corinthians are inconsistent, baptizing for those already dead and denying life after death". Rather he offers the suggestion that it refers to the practice of baptizing those not really adequately prepared for baptism, but, because they are ill, "as good as dead", are, out of compassion, being prematurely baptized. Similarly he rejects the view that preaching to the imprisoned spirits can mean preaching the gospel to those who had died as sinners at the time of the Flood. This would mean giving them a second chance, something he rejects as false doctrine. It must mean, he thinks, preaching to those among the sinners who had repented before they actually died in the Flood - basing this on 1 Peter 4.6, "alive in the Spirit". He admits that Peter could have expressed himself more clearly if he had written "among whom" and not simply "who did not obey" (3.20).

Calvin also seeks to defend an apostle from appearing to say what is less than truly apostolic. As we have seen, he interprets the verse 2 Peter 3.16 which speaks of the difficulty of understanding Paul as something written by an amanuensis and not by Peter himself. Similarly, when Paul in 1 Cor 8.9-10 seems to say that God is not interested in animal welfare, Calvin believes that what he really means is that God is more concerned about men (and the proper payment of the ministry) than about animals. As a final illustration of this point, he interprets 2 Cor 5.10, "We shall receive the consequences of what we have done in the flesh" to mean that, though our works are imperfect, God will graciously and generously accept these works done in faith and obedience, while the passage itself seems more to stress the fact that faith without works is dead.



### His open-mindedness

If occasionally - and I think we should stress the word "occasionally" - Calvin seems to us to want unduly to harmonize the ways of thought and expression of the great range of biblical writers, we ought to note two things strongly in his favour. First, he is a man of the sixteenth and not the twentieth century. We are very much more aware than the men of the Renaissance of the extent to which language itself is an expression of culture and how the use of words may differ from one author to another. Indeed Calvin was so alert that he noted how St Paul and St John used both sarx (flesh) and kosmos (world) in ways which differed the one from the other. A fuller recognition of this, and of the fact that men express their convictions with different metaphors and with varying emphasis, leads us to seek for less harmony of expression than was assumed in the sixteenth century under the influence of the great Aristotle with his confidence in the possibility of clear and final definition.

The second and more important form of defence in Calvin's favour is the extent of his open-mindedness. This has been rather obscured in popular thought, by his resolute and, at times, overstated defence of his philosophical idea of predestination, as an attempt to expound undoubted biblical teaching on God's lordship over the world and man. This open-mindedness to new truth can be illustrated in various ways. He is, for example, very interested in the new scientific discoveries of his time, in contrast to Luther's rejection of Copernicus' theory as absurd. In his commentary on Genesis 1.16, referring to the sun and the moon as the two larger lights, he says that the astronomers have established that Saturn is in fact bigger than the moon and so sun and moon are not the two greater lights in the universe. But, he continues, Moses is here describing the earthly bodies as they appear to the ordinary man, to show the greatness of the power of the Creator. There is no conflict with the astronomers. The Bible is thus not a textbook of science, but a reliable witness to the works of God. If we turn to tradition about biblical authors, he is

sure that Hebrews was not written by the apostle Paul, the style and presentation are quite different. He is inclined to follow Eusebius' view that the author may be Luke or Clement (Commentary on Hebrews xxvii). He draws an interesting distinction among the OT quotations in the NT. Some are exact quotations. Others are quotations from memory which give the essence of the OT passage but not in the same words. He believes that a writer, like a preacher, may use a quotation from a previous writer, giving it a meaning that fits his point (and so bring the point home) even if that is not what the original author meant. Thus when the author in Hebrews 2.7 quotes the eighth Psalm about man being made "a little lower than the angels", the author uses the phrase to mean, not "to a little extent" but "for a little while", Calvin comments, "It was not the apostle's design to give an exact explanation of the words. 'For there is nothing improperly done, when verbal allusions are made to embellish a subject in hand, as Paul does, in quoting a passage in Romans 10.6 from Moses, 'who shall ascend into heaven etc'. Here Paul does not join the words 'heaven and hell' for the purpose of explanation but as ornaments". Good scholar that he was, he saw no difficulty in rejecting a word in the text which could have got in by scribal error. So in Hebrews 11.37, for example, in the list of the sufferings of the men of faith, he has no hesitancy in rejecting "they were tempted" before they were "sawn asunder" as unsuitable and due to dittography, the words for "sawn" and "tempted" being so similar (ἐπρίσθησαν and ἐπειράσθησαν)

We see the same readiness to face problems in his detailed examination of the relation of the OT to the New. He was under attack from those like Servetus who treated the OT as purely a testament of law or by his opponents in the Sorbonne, who claimed that salvation was by good works. Calvin sees the OT as a foreshadowing of the New, referring explicitly to the letter to the Hebrews (Instit.II.11.4). He writes in the previous chapter of the Institutes (II.10,20) , "As the day of full revelation approached with the passing of time, the more He (God) increased each day the brightness of its manifestation. Accordingly, at the beginning, when the



first promise of salvation was given to Adam (Gen.3.5) , it glowed like a feeble spark. Then, as it was added to, the light grew in fulness, breaking forth increasingly and shedding its radiance more widely. At last, when all the clouds were dispersed, Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, fully illumined the whole earth." Here is a form of the theory of progressive revelation - not progressive advance by men but progressive enlightenment by God. It is this conviction that guided him in first commenting on almost the whole of the NT before he turned to the Old, and, when he did so turn, he began with what has often been considered the OT book which most foreshadows the New, the book of Isaiah. Here he even uses the NT to interpret the OT., e.g., in 1 Cor 2.9 in Paul's use of Isaiah 64.4. Calvin speaks frequently of God accommodating himself to human limitations. "God", he says, "accommodated diverse forms to different ages (Inst. II.11.13)". To speak of God as our enemy till reconciled in Christ is an expression accommodated to our capacity (II.16.2; cf I.17.13 on "God repenting"). God takes the initiative. One does not have to wait for forgiveness till one has first repented or been reconciled by Christ. There is no question of God simply standing for "justice" and Christ for "mercy". Again, when asked why Genesis did not deal with the creation of angels, Calvin replied that God was accommodating himself to the weakness of common folk, giving them what they could take in (Inst.I.14.3). This made him averse to speculation in general. We all know how, when he was asked what God was doing before He created the world, he replied with his grim humour, that He was cutting rods in the greenwood for those who asked impertinent questions. For Calvin, the Jews are like children whose weakness could not yet bear the full knowledge of heavenly things (Inst.II.7.2) , or like children under a tutor (Comm. on Galatians 4.2).

At the same time Calvin is sure that the OT is not what Servetus wanted to make it out to be, a testament of law. In it, as in the New, there is both grace and hope of life beyond death. To support this, he not only quotes passages like Isaiah 26.19-21, Daniel 12.1-2, and Job 26, but he so interprets the Psalmists faith in God

as their ultimate salvation. He reminds us of how the NT itself saw the OT saints as looking forward for a city which has foundations (Heb 11). His intention is always to see the two Testaments as a whole with the full light shining in the face of Christ. Sometimes he does treat a verse in the OT as absolute, as when he accepts the words of the Psalmist in the closing verse of Ps. 137, blessing the man who dashes the infant children of Babylon against a rock, without relating it to Paul's instructions to Christians to leave vengeance in the hands of God or of the lawfully appointed authorities (Romans 12 and 13). He defends this as a word from God, and not, as we would be inclined to say, as the expression of the Psalmist's natural horror at Babylonian barbarity (See R.S.Wallace, Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament, p110; McNeill, op.cit.p213). Dr Ronald Wallace in his book brings out very impressively what a strong sense Calvin had of the Bible as the Word of God. Here God speaks to us as nowhere else and we must take what he says with due awe and reverence.

As we come to sum up our findings, we could do much worse than refer to the four headings under which the famous nineteenth German orthodox scholar Tholuck characterized the achievement of Calvin, a judgement which the editors of the English translation of Calvin's commentaries printed in their final volume, the commentary on Joshua (pp345-375)

The first quality which Tholuck singled out in Calvin's Doctrinal Impartiality. He will expound the passage in its clear sense, unlike those who alter its meaning to fit in with their theology. Thus in his interpretation of the famous passage of Peter's confession in Matthew 16.18 Calvin believes that it is Peter himself, thus enlightened, who is the rock and not simply Peter's faith. When he expounds 1 Cor 14.53 about women keeping silent in the Church, he comments that, while this is a general rule in the Church, there are exceptions, such presumably as the prophetesses in both OT and OT. When he notes that Jude (v9) quotes an incidence in the Apocrypha, he writes that this may contain a genuine tradition. He comments on the phrase "that it may be fulfilled", common in the NT and introducing quotations from the OT. He notes that



sometimes this refers to a direct fulfilment of OT prophecy and at other times to a fulfilment, which resembles the OT passage in an analogous way but is not a direct fulfilment. (cf. Tholuck on Joshua p351)

The second mark of Calvin's exegesis in Tholuck's judgment is his Exegetical Exactness. More than Luther or Melancthon before him, he seeks out the precise meaning of the Greek and Hebrew words. On Psalm 9.17, for example, he has to admit that he is uncertain of the exact meaning of the Hebrew word, Sheol which the next century interpreters were so uncertain of, so that our Authorized Version translated the word 31 times as "Hell" and 31 times as "the grave". As we have already noted, he observed the different use by Paul and John of the words "sarx" and "kosmos". Again and again he takes great pains to find out the exact meaning of the Hebrew or Greek word. While he, like all men before the discovery of the papyri, had to use the earlier classical Greek authors as his models, he did note, for example, that the NT uses "ecclesia" in a sense different from the classical authors. Just as he probably felt that he had not the key to interpret the apocalyptic language of the book of Revelation any more than a term like Sheol, so he, not unnaturally, tended to interpret those NT passages which we now recognize as expressing the early Christian expectation of Christ's speedy return, in terms of the fact that we all, in this short life, are not far distant from meeting our Lord at death.

The third characteristic which Tholuck notes is the extent of his Learning. He has a most accurate knowledge of scripture. Someone has counted how, in the Institutes, there are 3098 quotations from the NT and 1755 from the OT. He can easily put his finger on parallel passages all over scripture. As the Institutes show, he has also a remarkable and accurate knowledge of the Church Fathers especially of Augustine, but in the commentaries he prefers to illustrate from other passages of scripture.

This brings us to Tholuck's fourth, and, in many ways, most important characteristic, Calvin's deep Christian Piety. He has "a lively religious feeling". His Christian experience of the mercy of God in Christ gives

him a profound insight into the meaning of the words of prophet and apostle. "He lives in the persons he expounds. His sudden conversion which he simply mentions and no more, in the preface to the Psalm, gave him a zeal for scripture. (cf. McNeill, op.cit.p108). He finds the Bible self-authenticating. The illumination of the Holy Spirit enables Christians to be certain that here is the Word of God.

I will close with some sentences taken from his exposition of the third chapter of St John's Gospel, which make this insight clear, and so make him a very great exegete:

"This Nicodemus was a distinguished man and at the same time upright, and yet ignorant and unenlightened with regard to the facts of the internal spiritual world.....The Evangelist relates the history in full, because it contains instruction respecting the corrupt nature of the human race and because it teaches who has rightly entered into the school of Christ.... The learned scribe comes by night: for the splendour of his own dignity had blinded his eyes....Many indeed long for a new doctrine, merely because it is new. It is easy to see, however, that it was not curiosity which influenced Nicodemus, for he wished to be thoroughly instructed....(But) the mind of Nicodemus was a field grown over and over with tares. It needed first to be cleared and ploughed. This was the object of the discourse on the new birth....The Kingdom of God is not, as many suppose, heaven but rather that spiritual life, which is begun by faith in this world and daily increases. ....Attention must be paid to the term Born Again. It denotes the commencement of a new existence in respect to the whole man".

This last sentence makes clear the fulness of Calvin's insight. "The whole man" is altered by the new birth and so, as well as justification, there must be sanctification and discipline, following up the light shed by Word and Sacrament.



1. Introduction

In his book Kingship and the Psalms /1, J.H. Eaton has drawn upon the material in many of the individual psalms in order to construct the Israelite ideal of kingship, or to be more precise the ideal of kingship held by Israelite piety within the Jerusalem establishment. The data for such a picture are provided by many different psalms, of varied authorship, dating and history, but it seems reasonable to suppose that the ideals of kingship as voiced within the liturgy of the Jerusalem cult varied little with the passage of time, from the era of David himself down till the dynasty ended in the early sixth century B.C.

It has often been remarked that the historical picture of the monarchy, in Judah no less than the Northern Kingdom, differs very sharply from the ideals of the psalmists. The books of Kings, in particular, offer the reader an unattractive picture of most of the actual kings who took the throne of Israel or of Judah.

The books of Samuel present yet another picture of kingship in Israel. They belong with Kings, of course, in the series of historical books of the Old Testament which by general consent are nowadays referred to as the "Deuteronomistic History" /2, and as such are very different from the Psalter. Nevertheless, we find in the books of Samuel a rather different perspective on Israel's leaders than we get in Kings. There are two reasons for this fact. In the first place, the books of Samuel cover the era when Israel first adopted a monarchy, an era when David himself, later viewed as an ideal ruler, lived out his career. The books of Samuel also present the prophet Samuel as something of an ideal ruler in Israel (and as a quasi-king, we might add). By contrast the books of Kings record the slow but steady decline of the monarchy - a picture of moral and political weakness, with few bright spots to be seen. Secondly, the treatment of Israel's rulers offered in Samuel is more vivid and varied than we find in Kings,

which strongly suggests the use of different sources or at least a different literary prehistory. Recent scholarship emphasises the many "prophetic" aspects of Samuel; it has been argued that there was an earlier edition of Samuel which may appropriately be termed a "Prophetic History" /3, to distinguish it from the final "Deuteromonic" redaction.

It is at least certain that many passages in the books of Samuel show a clear prophetic interest, in various ways. For instance, prophetic figures play important roles in the narrative, and there is a concurrent interest shown in predictions and their fulfilment, in prophetic warnings, advice and guidance. If it is true, then, that the Psalter offers us a liturgical or priestly ideal of kingship, then Samuel offers us something of a prophetic ideal of leadership. Leadership is a slightly broader term than kingship, and allows us to consider a Samuel as well as a David. Between these two near-ideal rulers is sandwiched the career of Saul. His is primarily an example to be shunned, a contrast to ideal leadership; yet the portrait is a subtle one, for he was a king who started well, and even at the end had some admirable qualities, as David's elegy emphasised /4. Indeed, David's own career is by no means unblemished /5. The portraits are thus complex, but the biblical writer or writers on the whole leave us in little doubt about their evaluation of characters and deeds, even though they do not often moralize. The portrait of leadership to be drawn from the books of Samuel is filled out by the lesser but not unimportant or irrelevant figures of Eli, Amnon and Absalom, who also either led or aspired to lead the Israelite nation.

Due to the very different style and content of Samuel, as compared with the Psalter, we are given far more details about the leaders of Israel than is provided by relevant passages in the Psalms. One difficulty about this fact is that one must seek to distinguish the incidental (or accidental) from the substantial features. For instance, we may fairly assume that to be a skilled musician like David was so to speak a bonus, not a necessary nor even a specially desirable trait in a national leader /6. On the other hand, what are we to make of the information that Saul, David and Absalom



were in their youth outstandingly handsome men /7?  
 There is good reason to suppose that this was not at the  
 time a sort of optional extra but an important aspect of  
 leadership, "a physical symptom of special divine favor"  
 /8. If so, this requirement must have lapsed as the  
 kingship became dynastic; there is no guarantee that good  
 looks will continue permanently as a family trait. Even  
 so, the ideal could well have persisted, though scarcely  
 as a major requirement.

## 2. Relationship with God

Much the same can be said, with more confidence, regard-  
 ing the charisma of the Spirit of Yahweh, with which  
 Samuel, Saul (initially) and David were all endowed /9.  
 This feature of the early kingship, a heritage from the  
 period of the judges, again died out with the establishment  
 and continuation of a dynasty in Judah. Very probably  
 the charismatic tradition was more persistent in the  
 Northern Kingdom, but there too it would seem that the  
 tangible and visible effects of the Spirit of God were no  
 longer in evidence /10. In neither kingdom, however,  
 was the tradition forgotten altogether; it reappeared  
 strongly in the messianic concept /11, and we may be  
 sure that throughout the generations it remained an ideal  
 that the king should be truly empowered by God's Spirit.

Without question, then, the books of Samuel imply that  
 a first essential in the equipment of an ideal leader was  
 the endowment of the Spirit. While in the Old Testament  
 the action of the Spirit is generally depicted as having  
 temporary rather than lasting effects (where judges and  
 the early kings are concerned, the leader is empowered  
 by Yahweh to deliver Israel from military foes), never-  
 theless God could be expected to renew the endowment of  
 the Spirit whenever it might be necessary. Thus we read  
 that "the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from  
that day forward", i.e. from the day of his first anoint-  
 ing /12. The Spirit of the Lord was, then, a semi-  
 permanent endowment of the ideal king.

The endowment of the Spirit was by its very nature a  
 gift from Yahweh, not some characteristic or quality of  
 the king himself. It is made clear in 1 Samuel, never-

theless, that Yahweh did not impart his Spirit to the unworthy. The same passage in 1 Samuel 16 which records David's receipt of the Spirit is at pains to re-emphasise his inner qualities: "the LORD sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" (verse 7). The chapter goes on to record that Samuel, now that he had twice been guilty of wilful disobedience to Yahweh, had the Spirit taken from him.

Thus the endowment of the Spirit is linked with the broader topic of the leader's relationship with God. In all situations and circumstances, not just military emergencies, the leader of Israel was expected to be in touch with Yahweh and obedient to his expressed will. Samuel was himself a prophet and so had direct access to God's will, while both Saul and David had access to prophets, and were plainly supposed to obey them as Yahweh's spokesmen. Nowhere is this clearer than in chapters 13 and 15 of 1 Samuel, the account of Saul's double disobedience to Samuel's instructions /13, which led to his double rejection by Yahweh. The kings had their counsellors - Joab, Hushai, Ahithopel and others - and at times quite properly rejected their advice, but there was to be no arguing with nor dissent from the prophetic word.

No doubt the king was expected too to preserve a right relationship with God in the careful maintenance of religious and cultic ceremonial. This lesson may be implicit in 2 Samuel 6, the account of the coming of the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. But if so, one must observe that there is little emphasis on this aspect of the king's responsibilities towards God. 2 Samuel 6 by no means highlights this royal duty. Some commentators find this lesson in 1 Samuel 13 and 15, since on both occasions Saul broke sacral precepts; however, the emphasis in both chapters is upon the prophetic word, not upon the nature of the breach itself. In the intervening chapter, 1 Samuel 14, we find a narrative in which Saul is described as breaching a sacred oath (namely to execute Jonathan) under the pressure of public opinion, and it is obvious that the writer's sympathies lay with public opinion.

The correct emphasis is



made fully explicit in Samuel's famous declaration in 1 Samuel 15:22f, that "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams". The king's duties in the religious and cultic sphere were then subsumed under his general duties of obedience to God's expressed will. It was the prophetic word which was paramount; in the hierarchy of Israel, the king stands below the prophet, in the eyes of the writer of the books of Samuel. In practice, of course, things must have been very different, as the Ahab stories in 1 Kings demonstrate plainly enough.

The consultation of the oracle through the ephod is the other route in Samuel to learning God's will. It is noteworthy that David is constantly depicted as consulting the ephod in his earlier years. The ephod plays little role in the stories of his later years, however, and conceivably David's fall from grace is to be interpreted as due to his failure to ascertain the will of Yahweh. If this possibility be dismissed as an argument from silence, we should nevertheless note that 1 Samuel 14:18 may give some support to the concept. Unfortunately there is a major textual problem in this verse, and we cannot be sure whether Saul called for "the ark" (so MT) or "the ephod" (so the Septuagint). The latter reading is however preferred by the majority of commentators; if it is the correct reading, then the passage tells how Saul changed his mind about consulting the oracle and as a result, out of touch with God's wishes and guidance, caused the Israelite victory over the Philistines to be considerably diminished.

In all respects, then, the king was supposed to be in touch with Yahweh, aware of his will and fully submissive to it. He must not put his faith in big battalions. Saul's breach of Samuel's instructions in 1 Samuel 13, due to his anxiety to fight the Philistines before his army ebbed away disastrously, was an act of faithlessness as well as disobedience. What the king needed to know and consider was the will of God, not the logistics of Israel's armies. In its own way, 2 Samuel 24 reinforces the same lesson.

### 3. Duties towards subjects

The books of Samuel portray the leader of Israel in a wide variety of human situations - with friend and foe,

ally and traitor, relative and in-law, soldiers, courtiers, etc. To one's supporters and friends the ideal was gratitude and loyalty. This comes to clearest expression in the aftermath of Absalom's rebellion, when David was prevented by Joab from allowing his personal bereavement to take precedence over his debt of gratitude to his army /14. David was usually prompt to demonstrate gratitude: he repaid Barzillai and his associates for provisioning him during Absalom's revolt and he repaid the cities of Judah which had given him succour during his fugitive period in the Judaeian wilderness /15. To critics and personal enemies, on the other hand, **moderation** and magnanimity were important: Saul took no action against those who had been reluctant to recognise him as king, and David granted Shimei a pardon, even though, as the sequel revealed, he never forgave Shimei inwardly /16. Saul's ruthless and vindictive measures against the priesthood and city of Nob provide us with a contrast, the sort of conduct which was inexcusable in any king /17.

With relatives and close friends the king was to be strong and determined, descending neither to favouritism nor to sectional interest. David's weakness and indulgence towards his wayward sons provides us with a negative example, while his efforts to reconcile both Judah and the northern tribes after the defeat of Absalom show the vital importance of fair-handed dealings for the unity of the nation. 2 Samuel 21 is of particular interest, since it appears to show an interest in what might be termed second-class citizens. The Gibeonites had no legal redress against Saul's maltreatment, but God is depicted as overruling in order to force David's hand into giving them their full rights.

Humanitarian ideals are also to be observed in the attitudes towards a king's predecessors which the books of Samuel in effect recommend. The apologetic motive behind a considerable number of the narratives about David has often been noted. Many of the stories in 1 Samuel 16-31 go out of their way to clear him of the slightest act of treason or conspiracy against Saul. In 2 Samuel his complete innocence as regards the deaths of Abner and Ishbosheth is stressed, and the fact that he gave orders for the execution of seven of Saul's



progeny is explained away /18. It would seem from all this that David's supporters felt an urgent need to counteract Saulide polemic and propaganda. Yet such a political motivation cannot have been felt much beyond the death of David: Why did the later compiler or redactor of Samuel preserve so much of this sort of material? There is a further consideration; we are apt to forget that in the ancient world it was no uncommon thing for a new ruler to eliminate all potential rivals, and one might have supposed that outside Saul's own family and tribe few Israelites would have been perturbed if David had turned traitor to Saul, helped to overthrow him, and gone on to kill prominent members of his family.

The implication of the apologetic material in Samuel can only be that it would have been very wrong, according to Israelite ideals, for David to have taken seditious action against Saul or violent action against his kin. Abigail puts the ideal into words for us: "My Lord shall have no cause for grief, or pangs of conscience, for having shed blood without cause", she told David /19. She averred that God could be trusted to defend his chosen king against his personal enemies /20, and here again she is clearly expressing the standpoint of the author.

Magnanimity, then, is the desideratum, even though the ruler who shows it is taking some personal risk. The risk is plain to see in the story of Saul's grandson Mephibosheth, who was spared and indeed honoured by David, and later had the opportunity to turn against his benefactor /21. Whether he did so or not is perhaps unclear, but that question is not directly relevant. In any case God sided with David, who emerged unscathed from the revolt of Absalom, and so Mephibosheth's potential hostility or treachery came to nothing. Thus the account of the failure of Absalom's revolt confirms the truth of Abigail's words that God would preserve the king's life against malicious foes.

On the other hand, those who break serious laws are in a very different category; they merit not magnanimity but on the contrary, severe punishment. The self-confessed killers of Saul and of Ishbosheth are executed

without mercy /22. A Shimei can throw stones and curse at David, but an Amalekite cannot presume to help Saul commit suicide.

#### 4. Personal qualities

What personal qualities characterized a good leader? In the historical circumstances of the era, it is not surprising that the ruler's abilities as a soldier and general seem to have been paramount. The elders who demanded a king wanted above all someone to lead them into battle, we are told /23. The Philistine threat was defeated by David, but as the years rolled by Israel and Judah found themselves confronted by ever stronger enemies - Arameans, Assyrians and Babylonians - and undoubtedly the ideal of high military skills remained constant. This is confirmed by the later prophetic description of the ideal Davidic king in Isaiah 9:6 (Hebrew 9:5), which includes the title 'el gibbor, "in battle God-like" /24.

It should be observed, however, that the ideal king is not a conqueror but a deliverer. It is true that the books of Samuel record how David came to acquire something of an empire, but most of his wars were initially defensive. 2 Samuel 10 shows that it was the Ammonites who provoked warfare with David; and we may deduce from his severity towards Moab (2 Samuel 8:2), following earlier friendly relations (cf. 1 Samuel 22:3f), that the Moabites must have broken a treaty or taken some very hostile action towards David. Typically, in any case, the leaders of Israel are portrayed in Samuel as rescuing Israel from the inroads of her enemies.

The succinct pen-portrait of the youthful David placed on the lips of one of Saul's courtiers adds another royal trait - "prudent in speech" (n<sup>e</sup>bon dabar) /25. Such a phrase encapsulates two supreme desiderata in a good leader: intelligence and insight, coupled with the ability to speak effectively. The prophet Samuel in 1 Samuel 7 well exemplifies these two qualities, as he reads his people's minds and rebukes them effectively. The king must be able to recognise the truth when he hears it and decide accordingly. At least three individuals are shown as deficient in this respect: Saul failed to



recognise the truth of Ahimelech's words, Hanun failed to observe the lunatic folly of his counsellors' advice, and Absalom failed to discern that Ahithophel's plan of campaign was clearly superior to Hushai's /26. David, however, several times overruled his advisers, such as those who wanted to kill Saul in the wilderness, or to strike down Shimei on the spot /27, and thereby showed his wisdom and far-sightedness.

Closely linked with this ideal is the ability to command, a sense of authority. Saul's authority is emphasised in 1 Samuel 11, when he first issued his peremptory summons to battle against Ammon, and subsequently overruled those who wanted to kill his earlier critics. It is apparently a sign of his ebbing authority when he finds himself overruled by his men in chapter 14. More than one leader of Israel failed to exercise authority within his own palace (so to speak). Eli was weak and ineffective in handling his sons; even Samuel failed to control his sons; and David's troubles with his sons are notorious.

/28. Saul, interestingly enough, seems to be the one exception; within his own family he was and remained powerfully dominant.

The king should be a man of his word, honourable, loyal and trustworthy even to his own hurt. These characteristics are well illustrated in David's generous treatment of Mephibosheth, who, as noted above, was potentially a source of danger to him. It may be noted in passing that a number of scholars have suggested that by bringing Mephibosheth to the royal court David was not so much honouring him as placing him under observation; there are however, no strong grounds for interpreting David's actions thus /29. and it is at least clear that the narrator saw and described David's conduct towards Mephibosheth wholly in positive terms. David not only showed magnanimity towards this grandson of Saul but more, he scrupulously maintained his loyalty to a man long since dead, namely Mephibosheth's father Jonathan /30. David's deceitfulness towards Ahimelech at Nob is acknowledged to be reprehensible; David himself later admitted his fault /31. Where Israel's foes are concerned, however, it seems that to the biblical writer deceit

was legitimate, or at least not reprehensible. The story of how David fooled the Philistine king Achish more than once is recounted with some relish, it would seem; but it is true that the narrator's purpose was probably to emphasise the grave plight in which David found himself, and desperate situations demand desperate remedies /32.

Above all, the king's reliability must be seen in the realm of law and its administration. The ideal of the just king was no doubt an ancient Near Eastern stereotype and it surfaces in several ways in the books of Samuel. Saul's trial and verdict in the case of Ahimelech and Nob are a travesty of justice, but David is the model of a just king - even when the criminal at the bar is, he discovers too late, himself /33. Absalom's ploy in attracting a following /34 suggests that there were delays in the machinery of justice rather than positive injustices under David's rule, but at least the point is made that the proper and thorough maintenance of justice and equity was a vital and indispensable royal role /35.

That a king should not be grasping or rapacious in any way is a point made in more ways than one. The prophet Samuel's description of the intrinsic nature of kingship in 1 Samuel 8, with its monotonous repetition of yiqqah, "he will take", speaks for itself. The urge to seize other men's belongings is all too typical of national leaders, as the familiar story of King Ahab and Naboth's vineyard demonstrates /36. D.M. Gunn has argued that two dominant motifs of David's career as king are precisely "giving" and "grasping" /37. As a rule rapacity did not characterize David - notably, he made no attempt whatever to gain Saul's crown - but he did seize Bathsheba and stole her husband's life from him. In punishment of David Amnon seized Tamar and Absalom stole his life, going on to steal the kingdom from David. Early in 1 Samuel we note the same sort of wilful greed exhibited by Eli's sons /38.

#### 4. The Function of the King

It remains to consider briefly three metaphors for kingship which the books of Samuel offer us. The first appears in 2 Samuel 21:17, where David is described by



his troops as "the lamp of Israel", a recognition of his centrality and his value to the nation. Today we should probably employ rather different metaphors to express the same idea, e.g. that he provided Israel with a "focus", or that the nation was "rudderless" without his leadership. Ideally the king was indeed "worth ten thousand" of his subjects, as his troops declared on another occasion /39.

In 2 Samuel 23:4 the value of just rule is depicted as like "morning light" and the morning sun, and also like "rain", beneficial and productive natural phenomena. In other words, justice is more than a negative benefit, a mere absence of wrongdoing; it is the very basis of a sound and united society, and in Israel it was the king who was solely responsible for ordering and maintaining it.

Finally, the familiar concept of the king as shepherd is expressed, though by use of the verb rather than the noun, in 2 Samuel 5:2: God had ordained that David should "be shepherd" of Israel. This was a metaphor for kingship common throughout the Near East, and may sometimes have been a mere cliché; but yet it conveniently summarizes the ideal of leadership for us. The king was a person whose whole raison d'être was the welfare of his people, whom he was to support, maintain and protect against all outside marauders while treating each of his flock as of equal value. In the Christian church we are thoroughly familiar with the concept of the minister as shepherd or pastor; it is interesting to consider that the ancient Near East saw the king's proper function in the same light.

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In the books of Samuel, then, we find quite a rounded and comprehensive picture of leadership, a picture which not only sought to describe the past but to establish a blueprint for the future. Undoubtedly there is a latent Messianic thrust in Samuel. For the Christian reader, Samuel leaves us the possibility of matching the blueprint with the words and deeds of "great David's greater Son", and also of assessing our own attempts at Christian leadership in the light of the ideals of ancient Israel.

Notes

1. J.H. Eaton, Kingship and the Psalms (SBT ii, 32), London 1976.
2. For a brief account of the Deuteronomistic History in recent scholarship, see the entry by D.N. Freedman in **IDB**, Supplementary volume, Nashville 1976, pp 226ff.
3. See especially P.K. McCarter, I Samuel (Anchor Bible, 8), Garden City 1980, pp 18-23.
4. Cf. 2 Samuel 1:-9-27.
5. David's adultery with Bathsheba and subsequent murder of her husband are all too well known; but in general he is portrayed in realistic human terms, even if the picture tends towards idealisation.
6. Amos 6:5 might express some criticism of David in this regard.
7. 1 Samuel 9:2; 16:12; 2 Samuel 14:25f.
8. Cf. McCarter, op.cit, p173.
9. Samuel himself by implication (cf. 1 Samuel 3); 1 Samuel 10:10; 16:13.
10. A. Alt (VT 1(1951) pp 7-22; republished in English in Essays in Old Testament History and Religion, Oxford (1966), pp 239-259) emphasised the differences in this respect between the two kingdoms. However, by "charismatic" Alt was referring to the concept of the divine choice of each king or judge, expressed through a prophet, rather than to any evidence of the divine spirit's endowment.
11. Cf. Isaiah 11:1f.
12. 1 Samuel 16:13.

13. D.M. Gunn argues in his monograph, The Fate of King Saul (Sheffield, 1980), pp 33-56, that the narrator of 1 Samuel 13 and 15 was less than sure that Saul was guilty of such disobedience. In spite of the difficulties these chapters pose for modern readers, however, it seems to me beyond question that the original writer or writers considered Saul guilty.
14. 2 Samuel 19:1-8.
15. 2 Samuel 19:31-40; 1 Samuel 30:26-31.
16. 1 Samuel 11:12f; 2 Samuel 19:-6-23; 1 Kings 2:8f.
17. 1 Samuel 22: 16-19.
18. 2 Samuel 3:28-39; 4:9-12; 21:1-6.
19. Cf. 1 Samuel 25:31. Although Abigail was speaking primarily about her own husband and household, it may be that her husband Nabal figures as a sort of symbol for Saul; cf. R.P. Gordon, Tyndale Bulletin 31 (1980), pp 37-64, who can even describe Saul as "Nabal's alter ego" (p43).
20. Cf. 1 Samuel 25:29.
21. Cf. 2 Samuel 9; 16:1-4.
22. 2 Samuel 1:13-16; 4:9-12.
23. 1 Samuel 8:19f.
24. This is the NEB rendering of the phrase, traditionally rendered "(the) mighty God".
25. Cf. 1 Samuel 16:18.
26. Cf. 1 Samuel 22:14ff; 2 Samuel 10:3ff; 17:1-14.
27. 1 Samuel 24:4-7; 26:8-11; 2 Samuel 16:5-13.



28. 1 Samuel 2:22-25; 8:1ff; 2 Samuel 13ff.
29. 2 Samuel 9 tells us that Mephibosheth's previous residence was in decent obscurity close to the borders of Israel; it seems likely that he was less of a hazard here in Lo-debar than in the capital, to which David transferred him.
30. Cf. 2 Samuel 9:1. It is unfortunate that some English translations obscure the theme of loyalty that is inherent in the Hebrew noun hesed in this verse; 2 Samuel 10:2 uses precisely the same phraseology for loyalty to an international treaty.
31. 1 Samuel 21f; see especially 22:22.
32. Cf. 1 Samuel 21:13f; 27:8-12; 28:1f; 29:8f.
33. 1 Samuel 22:11-19; 2 Samuel 12:1-7.
34. 2 Samuel 15:1-6.
35. On this general topic, see now K.W. Whitelam, The Just King (Sheffield, 1979).
36. 1 Kings 21.
37. Cf. D.M. Gunn, The Story of King David (Sheffield, 1978), pp 94-103.
38. 1 Samuel 2:12-17.
39. 2 Samuel 18:3.

Liberation through God's Righteousness\*

David Hill

"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe...." With these majestic words Paul commences what is probably the most theologically profound and crucially important pericope in the letter to the Romans (3.21-28). Every phrase, indeed every single word, carries weight and would bear investigation and exposition; we shall concentrate on one or two in the interests of advancing our exploration of similarities between "the righteousness of God" as handled by Paul and "the kingdom of God" in the teaching of Jesus. I hope that this way of looking at some major Pauline assertions will not be confining, but instructive and even liberating.

The pericope begins with the striking "But now". A clear contrast is intended. Over against past history something new has happened. And it was necessary for some initiative to be taken. For "all have sinned", everybody has been trapped by the power of sin: "for I have already charged that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin" (3.9). Those who cut themselves off from God are captured by an alien power. The sinful actions which Paul lists at the end of Romans 1 are not so much the crime in his view as the punishment for the crime. When man turns from God to sin - and three times in chapter 1 Paul describes this, man's basic sin: it is refusing to give glory to God, exchanging the truth about God for a lie, refusing to acknowledge God - he is left by God to wallow in sin and in the sins into which this sin leads him. And although pious, observant Jews may not be wallowing in these vices, they are nevertheless unable to shake themselves free from that basic sin of mankind - which may be summed up as self-centredness, the concern with one's own well-being. The Law may be given by God himself but it is incapable of saving anyone from himself: like man, it has been taken over by the alien power, sin and manipulated for its own ends. In this connection there is a very revealing point made in Romans 9.30-32: "What shall we say then?... that Israel who pursued the righteousness which is based on law did not succeed in fulfilling that law? Why?

Because they did not pursue it through faith, but as if it were based on works (Οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως ἀλλ' ὡς ἐξ ἔργων)." What has gone wrong in Israel's case is not the pursuit of the law as intended by God to show them how they might be righteous and to point to God's own righteousness: no, what Paul finds fault with is the way in which Jews pursued the law. Instead of pursuing it ἐκ πίστεως, "on the basis of faith". they pursued it "as (if it were attainable) on the basis of works". Paul seems to be clearly implying that if only Israel had pursued it "on the basis of faith" instead of "as on the basis of works" they would have penetrated to the law's inner meaning and received the gift it pointed to. But what does Paul mean by the expression "pursue the law on the basis of faith"? Surely it was that recognition of and response to the claim of faith which God makes through the law, which includes submitting to the law's judgment of one's life, realizing that one is unable to obey it so adequately as to put God in one's debt, accepting the mercy and forgiveness offered by God, and, in reply to his grace, making a beginning of yielding oneself to him in gratitude and love and so of allowing oneself to be turned in the direction of obedience, of openness to him and to one's fellow man. But Israel, instead of responding to God's law with faith, has insisted on trying to get to grips with it on the basis of works, on trying to establish a claim on God - to be his creditor rather than his debtor. /1 But this attempt - an illusory quest - could only be a failure because it is the outworking of sin, the power of sin taking over the law itself in precisely the same way as it has taken over man: both man and law are drawn away from their true and intended relationship to God and are trapped by the magnetic power and structure of sin which can use even God's law as an instrument of rebellion against his will.

But now! "But now the righteousness of God has been revealed...." Now, because God's sovereignty over the world has been manifested. has made its epiphany in Jesus Christ, the situation has been changed, for Jews and for Gentiles, as well - and the transforming revelation is χωρὶς νόμου "apart from law". Let us consider the significance of that statement. It means that the whole business of the demonstration by God of his sovereign



righteousness has been removed out of the sphere of law: the proceedings are extra-legal; we are, I think, in the throne-room rather than the law-court. In relation to man and man's situation God acts not as administrator of the law, not as magistrate - for, if he did, he would have to condemn - but as king of his own kingdom issuing a free pardon. God's way of dealing with sinful men - the manifestation of his righteousness or sovereignty - is in terms of amnesty rather than acquittal, a regal rather than a judicial act. That is why I am very doubtful about the correctness of the NEB's rendering of Romans 4.5, in relation to God, as "he who acquits the guilty". You cannot acquit a man who is guilty; but you can refrain from charging him. And God does not acquit the guilty: he with sovereign authority over all legal processes, issues an amnesty or free pardon. But that does not compromise his own righteousness or God-ness: God must be δίκαιος as well as δίκαιῶν. But how can he be so? Perhaps the best way to answer that question is to set aside two quotations from Romans: first, the remarkable description of God in 4.5 as "the one who justifies the ungodly" (i.e. as doing the very thing that is forbidden in the law: Exod 23.7 (ὅτι οὐ δίκαιώσεις τὸν ἀσεβῆ)) , and the one from 3.26 "he (God) justifies him who has faith in Jesus". The justification of the ungodly does not apply to or comprehend every sinful Tom, Dick and Harry" (Manson, 58) , but rather those who, though sinful, yet stand in a certain relation to Jesus. This, however, would be quite arbitrary unless that relation to Jesus which Paul calls being ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ meant something with a definite bearing on sin and righteousness. To put the matter in a word, what is required in order that a justifying God may himself be just is that the justified sinner should be a repentant sinner. If that is so, then the supreme work of Christ in relation to justification must be that he makes it possible for sinful man truly to repent, to throw off old loyalties and ties in order to make a new submission of the will to God. And this for Judaism was something a man ought to do, but for Christianity it is something which man can do because Christ has made it possible. "God has exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5.31). What before was command in the law and exhortation in the prophets is now the gift of God in Christ and this gift is received,

appropriated by faith. In Paul's view, man is incapable of responding to a command to repent, in the full sense of the word: he is enslaved by sin and cannot free himself from the chains that bind him. Only by an act of God can he be liberated. And for Paul Christ is that liberator who makes possible the repentance - the change of disposition and direction - which is necessary if man is to be justified by a righteous God and justified  $\chi\omega\rho\iota\varsigma \nu\omicron\mu\omicron\upsilon$ . Let me make it clear that I am not setting some conditions on God's exercise of his justifying mercy: I am simply asserting that if God is to be God, to be  $\delta\acute{\iota}\kappa\alpha\iota\omicron\varsigma$ , one who justifies sinners, those sinners must desire with their whole beings his grace and acceptance. Earlier in these lectures I observed that in the Gospels repentance and discipleship are presented in similar ways: I return to that point now simply to repeat that responsiveness - what is genuine biblical "repentance"  $t^{\text{ev}}_{\text{subah}}/\mu\epsilon\tau\acute{\alpha}\nu\omicron\iota\alpha$  - is the condition for experiencing the kingdom: likewise in Paul an attitude to, a relationship with, the Christ is the presupposition for the gracious act of God's sovereign righteousness, justification. In short, God will not, indeed cannot (if I may put it so), save those who do not want to be saved! But the repentant sinner, the justified sinner, is saved  $\chi\omega\rho\iota\varsigma \nu\omicron\mu\omicron\upsilon$ .

Now has that assertion, which is so obviously very important to Paul, any real relevance for us? Surely we are not likely to expect or seek justification, the actualization of God's rule and righteousness, in terms of "law": we know so much better. That blithe attitude may be dangerous. In the first place, it may rest on the assumption that "law" has to do, and for Paul had to do, with morality only - with ethics and the obviously related themes of conscience, guilt and sin. That this is how Paul has been interpreted for centuries by many in the West does not make it correct: /2 and the error will, no doubt, continue to be made, but - and this is the second point here - an adequate appreciation of "law" in Paul's writings will be missing. For Paul, as Jew, could not possibly detach the ritual from the ethical nor could he separate "law" in both senses from its total context, the covenant. Consequently, "law",  $\nu\omicron\mu\omicron\varsigma$ , is for the apostle power,  $\delta\acute{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\mu\iota\varsigma$ , which was part of salvation history and had even cosmic force - a power like "sin" and "death":

being under sin can be equated with being under the law in Romans 6.15-20. "Law" for Paul had dominion, a kind of lordship operative in the area we would roughly call "religion". It is "law" as power which is responsible for that syndrome of pious works and pious claims by which Israel tried to establish a claim on God - to be his creditor. It is "law" as power which created "the sphere within which the Jew tried to sunder himself from immorality and godlessness, viewed the history of his father's redemption as the guarantee of his own election and claimed God's grace as his personal privilege". /3 In short, the relevance of the Jewish nomism which Paul undermined with his declaration that the righteousness of God, the sovereignty of God over his world, has been revealed (in Jesus Christ)  $\chi\omega\rho\iota\varsigma\ \nu\omicron\mu\omicron\upsilon$  is this: it represents the community and the religious endeavour of "good" people which treat God's promises as their own privileges and turn God's commandments into the instruments of self-sanctification. There is more than a hint of Jewish "nomism" in certain forms of Protestant theology and teaching (let him who hath ears to hear, hear!), but for Paul this kind of attitude to God is called "sin" because all the pious deeds and claims are an attempt to coerce God, to bring God into dependence on us, to make him our creditor. The Gospel, according to Paul, lays bare this sin and the part played by the power of law in producing it. For the gospel does not begin with subjective feelings of guilt and pangs of conscience over failure to observe a moral code: it begins with man "fallen from his true relationship to God", man the victim of the powers that hold sway in his world (sin, death, law), a situation which shows its most sinister form in his reliance on his own goodness and merit. "Good" people, especially if they are what we call "religious" as well, find that kind of affirmation offensive. We do so want to be or be thought a little better or more worthy than we are, but "sinners" we are, whether pious ones or impious. But, proclaims Paul, God justifies, God brings no charge against the impious or ungodly: they participate in the liberating amnesty when they stand in a certain relation to Jesus.

And on this, and here I would want to be very emphatic, there is no difference between what Paul is affirming in



his own particular theological language and what we have discovered about Jesus from the gospels. Unlike the Pharisees and the Qumran sectarians, Jesus did not set out to make the pious person even more pious. "They that are well have no need of a physician": Jesus set out to go to the tax-collectors and sinners, that is, into the world of the ungodly (from every point of view). The pious people, were, generally speaking, against him or misunderstood him and finally engineered his crucifixion, if what the evangelists tell us is true. The "good" people had "standards" and therefore they were either sorry for or opposed to Jesus who - in the name of God and with the authority of the "sent-man", a prophet - took his stand beside the lost, the godless, the immoral, the sinners, call them what you will. As I said before, the fact that he stood with them does not mean that he condoned their misdeeds: no, he recognizes their humanness, their intrinsic value and he is alert to the silent plea which their isolation from society makes. Renewal, restoration, transformation take place. The kingdom- the sovereignty of God, God exercising his kind of kingship - is experienced as grace, and the piety of self-sanctification writhes in fear and anger and kills "the friend of tax-collectors and sinners" in order to protect the system. But it was Jesus who was vindicated by God, and his resurrection was the sign of the divine approval, the divine "Yes" to what he had been and done: therefore the "system", the law which condemned Jesus (by announcing that anyone who hung on a tree was accursed in God's eyes) was wrong in its verdict - which, in Paul's language, is that the righteousness of God, God's sovereignty in action, has been demonstrated "apart from the law". Moreover, to say that God justifies the penitent sinner is to do no more than use a special vocabulary to affirm the ultimate rightness of what Jesus did in graciously moving towards those outcasts of his day whose very isolation was their desperate call for recognition and help. Why Paul used the particular theological language he did is something we shall consider in the course of the next lecture, but at this stage I want to examine more closely terms associated with "justification", namely "faith", "grace" and "in Christ".

It is relatively straightforward now to secure

agreement on the meaning of ΠΙΣΤΙΣ in Paul (and I think it very seldom requires translation by "faithfulness") , it does not primarily mean assent to truths or dogmas but "trust", "response", even "commitment": what is not so easy is to determine the place or role of faith, perhaps I should say the status of faith, in Paul's teaching on justification. There is a splendid paragraph in Manson's little book (On Paul and John, p63) which is as pungent in expression as it is probing in its intention.

"The Pauline doctrine of Justification by Faith has often been stated in such a way that it is stultified, because faith is turned into a Christian virtue. The believer merits salvation on the ground of his faith. In that case all that has happened is that the old doctrine of Justification by Works has been brought back in a new form. Instead of a multiplicity of good deeds, God is content to accept one - namely the act of faith. It is equally possible to fly to the other extreme and state the doctrine of justification by faith in such a way that the faith of man ceases to be of any real significance at all. Faith is, so to say, made part of the process of justification. In our anxiety to exclude the idea of merit we exclude all initiative whatsoever on the human side and treat man as a mere bottle to be filled with the water of life. On the one side salvation is commercialized, on the other side, it is mechanized; and if it is wrong to regard Christ as having opened a new shop where salvation may be purchased with the coinage of faith, it is equally wrong to regard him as the founder of a system turning out justified robots by mass production."

But if we are not justified because of our faith, and if the significance of faith cannot be reduced to vanishing point, how do we get the balance right? With characteristic simplicity Manson himself puts it like this: "Salvation is absolutely and entirely the gift of God. Nothing that man can do can contribute in the smallest way to the gift. All that man can do - and it is the only thing that nobody else, whether man or God, can do for him - is to take what God gives. That is what Paul means by faith." Taking what God gives, accepting what God offers, which is acceptance of us as we are. To say that faith is acceptance of the fact that I am

accepted is, I know, to use language borrowed from Paul Tillich but, when one recalls the attitude of Jesus to the social and religious outcasts of his day, when one tries to use meaningful terms to speak of "justification", is "acceptance" so very wide of the mark as a way of denoting both the gift and the response? With regard to the latter, I suppose it could be argued that to speak of "faith" does less than justice to the very important stress on "trusting" that there is in ΠΙΣΤΙΣ, a trust in God's trustworthiness that leads to faithfulness or obedience: but what if words like "putting your trust (in God or in Jesus)" just do not assist understanding? May it not be that the language of "acceptance" will clarify? To say to someone for whom the real questions of life are taking shape, "Can you accept the fact that you are accepted by God - without your having to strive to make yourself better or anything else?" may be to express the issue of faith in its most meaningful way. In addition, the idea of "acceptance" has within it scope for many applications. If I can accept the assurance that God accepts me as I am - not as I ought to be, not as I would like to be, but as I actually happen to be - then there is some chance that I can accept myself, and that is immensely liberating: for if I can accept myself, then I no longer need to achieve worth or value at the expense of other people; I no longer need to be grabbing, jealous, possessive. If I can accept myself, my need to assert myself, my need to assert myself tends to disappear, and so on. Yes: "acceptance", as an idea, has very great potential in Christian affirmation: all I am suggesting now is the helpfulness of "acceptance" for a basic, but profound, understanding of "faith": acceptance of the fact that I am accepted by God, that is three-fourths and more of "having faith" and, thus explained, we can see why faith is never facile. Accepting the fact that he was accepted by God amazed, indeed overwhelmed, Paul and the other saints and sinners: that I am accepted by God I can hardly believe (intellectually or emotionally) but it is true. That's a beginning, if not the goal, of faith. Salvation or renewal or transformation in terms of "acceptance by God": response or faith in terms of "acceptance of acceptance": I am thankful to see it in those gospel stories about Jesus and the outcasts and I



am thankful to find it at the heart of Paul's doctrine of salvation: man takes what God gives, man accepts what God offers, which is acceptance.

And what about "grace"? While the slogan "justification by faith" can give the wrong impression, namely that I am justified because of, or on the grounds of my faith, the fuller form, "justification by grace through faith" may be regarded as a redundancy by those who know what they mean when they say "justification is grace". Still, for lesser minds, it may be the better way of speaking, for it does put the emphasis where it belongs. On what grounds am I justified? Not on the grounds of my faith but on the grounds of grace, God's grace. That is where the initiative comes from, that is the quality of the divine action, that is the name of the divine righteousness which sovereignly manifests itself "apart from law" -  $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$ , the unmerited kindness of God, the loyal - and because it is utterly loyal, therefore wonderfully merciful - love of God. In a sense this grace of God is justification: without it, without its manifestation and operation in Jesus the Christ, there would be no attitude of God towards man, no "stance" vis-à-vis man for a possible response. Grace gives the gift, and in no small measure, grace is the gift. And that is as true in Paul's systematic presentation of the matter as it is in the attitude and activities of Jesus himself: he did not only demonstrate graciousness, he lived grace, grace which moved from the pious to the sinner and worked its miracle of transformation through acceptance. I recall once again those beautiful words from the Pastorals: "When the goodness, the kindness and the generosity of God appeared .....he saved us" (Tit 3.4): notice, "he saved us", not our faith. And from the previous chapter, "The grace of God appeared...bringing salvation to, or perhaps better, making salvation possible for all men" (Tit 2.11). "Justification is an act of God's free grace", so the Catechism says: whatever else may be said about its answer, it has got "grace" in the right place. The grace of God justifies, not our faith: God shows the kind of sovereignty he exercises, the  $\delta\epsilon\kappa\alpha\lambda\omicron\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\nu\eta\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$  is disclosed as being that of grace.

I come now to what is often called the " $\epsilon\acute{\nu}\ \chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{\omega}$

formula", though I have doubts as to whether Paul would ever have termed it a formula! Volumes have been written on these two words and volumes will be written on them, as scholars try to explain and expound the tremendous significance they bear in Paul. We are all familiar with their interpretation in terms of "Christ-mysticism": I would not want to deny that there is such a thing in Paul as "Christ-mysticism" - can we ever really explain our continuing relationship with Christ? - but as far as "in Christ" goes, it is clear that in Paul's usage it is not the kind of thing that is commonly meant by mysticism. The mystic - in the usual sense of the word - is one who by a certain type of spiritual discipline comes to a special kind of experience - an indescribable sense of communion with the ultimate divine essence, of being absorbed in the Absolute Reality. The characteristic of this is that the number of people who attain to it is small and that even among this tiny religious aristocracy the experience in question is a rare and short-lived thing. But for Paul it is clear that what he is saying with the words "in Christ" is not something confined to the spiritual elite but the normal "position" or "situation" (to use inadequate language) for all Christians.

I begin from Gal 2.17: "if while seeking to be justified in Christ....δικαιωθῆναι ἐν Χριστῷ: I presume Paul meant what he wrote: if he had wanted to say "by Christ" or "through Christ", he could have said it and, on other occasions, did; here, in what is probably his earliest reflection on "justification", he speaks of it as taking place "in Christ". In other words (not very adequate, I admit) "ἐν Χριστῷ" is the locus of justification. We have to remember that essential to Paul's whole understanding of justification (though rarely spelled out in his letters) is the idea of Jesus' justification by God. The new, resurrected, undying life of Christ was, in Paul's eyes (for it is the heart of his conversion), the proof that God had vindicated Jesus, reversed the verdict which condemned him, and proclaimed that he was "righteous", in the right. On that vindication depends our vindication eventually (as we shall see), and on it depends our justification, for we have to be in some kind of relation to the Jesus who

was declared righteous, if we too are to be proclaimed righteous. Earlier, in this connection, I spoke of the attitude of repentance and linked that with the calling to discipleship in the Gospels. Now I want to open it a little further. There is nothing really analogous to the phrase "in Christ" except the phrase with which Paul himself contrasts it, namely, the phrase "in Adam": as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive". It would seem that in Paul's view there are two spheres that intersect: there is the sphere of humanity "in Adam" which includes everyone; and there is the sphere of those who are "in Christ", who have been incorporated into Christ. Those who have been baptized into Christ have participated in his death and resurrection. What happened to him happens to them. They are crucified with him - but crucified in order that they may share his life (Gal 2.20), and this means that they share in the verdict of "righteous" or "accepted" pronounced on him at the resurrection. And because Christ shared the condition of being "in Adam", the new sphere, the new creation, the new humanity was created and continues to grow within the circle of the old. Those who are "in Christ" are those who are sharing in his justified and resurrected life but in order to do so they must first share in his death.

That's what we find so difficult to accept. We want the new life of joy and peace, we want the triumph; but first we must die with Christ. There is no crown without the cross: there is no Easter without Good Friday. I think George Matheson's words express it well:

O Cross that liftest up my head,  
I dare not ask to fly from thee;  
I lay in dust life's glory dead  
And from the ground there blossoms red  
Life that shall endless be.

And "laying in dust life's glories" is not a pious sentiment. It is as hard as it sounds. It is dying to the world's glories in which achievement, success, prestige rate high in the scale of values. To count these as refuse is Christ's way to real fulfilment and new life.

The metaphor "being baptized into Christ" (and in the long run all these metaphors are saying the same thing) is



illustrated in 1 Corinthians from the experience of the Israelites: they, says Paul, were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea (1 Cor 10). That is illuminating. Having exchanged their loyalty from the Egyptian Pharaoh to God's prophet and servant Moses, the people of Israel had to act out that loyalty by obediently following Moses even when his instructed path looked as for disaster. Tested obedience was the mark of those following Moses. Doesn't it all recall - and begin to make sense of - sayings like "I have a baptism to be baptized with"....and "Can you (to eager and nonchalant friends) be baptized with the baptism wherewith I am baptized?" Jesus is plainly saying that he knows an apparently calamitous outcome lies ahead and he asks his followers, "Can you share it with me? Can you go through it with me?" In a certain sense they did, but that is not our concern here. What I am concerned to say is that what Jesus called his followers into, namely a relationship with himself that would last through persecution and suffering because it was founded on utter trust, is what Paul (in his systematic way) is affirming again as "baptism into Christ" or "justification in Christ". It is new life in a new context, in a new sphere. When we are ἐν Χριστῷ - and that seems to me to differ not at all in meaning from being a disciple, a μαθητῆς Ἰησοῦ - we are new men and women: we are experiencing a transforming friendship, we are, or at least are becoming, what God meant his people to be, we are justified, accepted. The locus of justification is "in Christ" and you get yourself there by being baptized into Christ. Baptism is the sign and occasion of our transferring loyalties from the Adamic regime to Christ's rule, of changing from one sphere to another. It demands sacrifice, self-surrender, the adopting of new standards and values "not of this world". By dying with Christ are we raised to new life, justified life - the life which, whatever this world's view of it may be - and it so contradicts our normal values as to look plain foolish (but is Mother Theresa a fool?) - we believe, and if we are really following we know, that this is the vindicated life, this is it, this is what we are here for and to do. I end with two very simple words of postscript. When I talked about Jesus' gracious movement towards the sinners and the religious and social

outcasts, I talked in the same lecture about his miracles, deeds of power over the chaotic and demonic, deeds which anticipated the new creation. Now I have been pointing out - at far too great length, I fear - that Paul's doctrine of justification is a systematic statement of what Jesus lived, and especially his acceptance of the rejected and unworthy. Paul says nothing, well hardly nothing, about miracles in his letters. He has time for only one - the miracle of "new creation". But does he need any more? If a man is in Christ, he is a new creation, whole, saved, "ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven". It is a miracle of grace. There is no credit to us for it, no merit. To be in that beautiful phrase "accepted in the beloved" is to be justified. Debtors to grace we are for the wonder of salvation.

And, finally, for your preaching. I find it a relief indeed I think life would be almost impossible if I did not have the relief of knowing that in this world, the sphere of Adam's pretty tyrannous rule, - in the world of dog-eat-dog, of cut-throat competitiveness, of selfishness, of petty pretentiousness, of dehumanizing ugliness, there is another possibility of life in another sphere in which the genuinely human (because they are spiritual, of God) values prevail, in which we are not tethered to quid pro quo, in which surrender of life brings fulfilment of life. Moreover there is only one condition for entry into this sphere, the Church, what someone has called "the sociological sphere of righteousness", which is that we realize our emptiness, that we know it is going to take a miracle to save us if we are to be saved at all, and that we turn in "wonder, love and praise" to the miracle-working grace of God and accept the fact that we are accepted, justified "in Christ". That is news almost too good to be true and too stupendous not to be true. That's why it is the gospel for all mankind and for individuals like you and me. To be "in Christ", to be justified by the righteousness of God, to be accepted as we are, like those despised tax-collectors and sinners in Jesus' ministry is indeed all of grace. Living in the new sphere, ἐν Χριστῷ, participating in the new humanity, demands obedience, the fruits of the Spirit, but I think that all could be summed up in a phrase much beloved by John Baillie, 'gratitude for grace'.

Notes

- \* The sixth in Dr Hill's series of lectures entitled "Kingdom and Righteousness", delivered in the Union Theological College, Belfast in November 1980.
1. Cf. C.E.B. Cranfield, "Some Notes on Romans 9.30-33" in Jesus und Paulus (ed. Ellis and Grässer (Göttingen 1975), pp35-43; also his Romans (ICC, Vol 2, 1979), pp 503-520 and Interpretation XXXIV (1980), pp70ff.
  2. Cf. K. Stendahl's well-known essay, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West" in Harvard Theological Review LVI (1963), pp199-215; also in Paul among Jews and Gentiles (London 1977), pp78-96
  3. E. Käsemann, "Justification and Salvation-History in the Epistle to the Romans" in Perspectives on Paul (ET, London 1971), pp60-78: quotation from p72.
  4. T.W. Manson, On Paul and John, (Ed. M.Black, London 1963), p63.



Derek Kidner, Love to the Loveless, the story and  
message of Hosea  
The Bible Speaks Today series, Inter-  
Varsity Press, 1981 pp142 £3.25

In inviting Derek Kidner to write the volume on Hosea for their The Bible Speaks Today series, the editors could scarcely have chosen a better man. The threefold aim of the series is to "expound the biblical text with accuracy, to relate it to contemporary life, and to be readable". Kidner has an inborn gift for communication and could never be unreadable; he has the scholarly qualifications and acumen for careful exposition; and he has carefully obeyed the editors' instructions to show concern for the contemporary situation. The result is a stimulating study of the book of Hosea, fresh and challenging.

As regard exposition, Kidner is of the conservative school, and shows no inclination to share the scepticism of those who argue that we know virtually nothing on the prophet himself; nor does he concern himself very much with discussions as to what is "authentic" and what is "secondary" in the book of Hosea. His footnotes are occasionally used to support a conservative opinion, but on the whole Kidner is happy to expound the text as we have it. The Hebrew text of Hosea, however, is full of problems, and these have to be confronted to some extent; Kidner does so with as light a touch as possible, and relegates most of the discussion to footnotes. Thus those readers who wish to ignore such problems altogether can easily do so, while those who are puzzling over the variations between modern English versions of Hosea get helpful guidance (and clear opinions). Occasionally the need to be brief has reduced the value of the book - in particular, the rich OT theme of "knowing the Lord" is passed over with undue speed and dispatch on page 37 - but the author's gift for concise expression usually allows him to be thought-provoking and stimulating even in a single sentence.

Kidner makes a valiant and not unsuccessful attempt to make Hosea's concerns of direct relevance to our very different world, for instance in his discussion of cultic prostitution and of polytheism. For the most part his explicitly modern analogies are good, as when he likens the

prophet's names for his children with a modern politician giving names such as "Peterloo or Katyn or Soweto". He leaves his analogies undefended and unexpounded, which makes them difficult to challenge; the reviewer, for instance, was a little unhappy to find the "religious pluralism" attacked by Hosea compared with "the studied neutrality of certain courses on world religions" (p55). An attempt at academic objectivity seems to me a far remove from syncretism, but who knows which precise courses in comparative religion Kidner has in mind? However, Kidner is more concerned to probe and to disturb than to mount direct and specific attacks and denunciations. On p57 he asks which of our theological schools, seminaries and churches "poses no threat to the faith of its initiates"? He hastily adds that he lacks both the courage and infallibility of Hosea in naming names! But the point is there to be taken nevertheless.

This is no exhaustive commentary, nor is it meant to be; but it could be ideal as a basis for Bible studies and group discussions and will also supply the bare essentials for many a sermon.

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D.F. Payne

James H. Charlesworth, assisted by P. Dykers and M.J.H. Charlesworth,

The Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research with a Supplement

Septuagint and Cognate Studies 7

Scholars Press for SBL, 1981 ppxiv+329 \$16.50

When the first edition of this work was published in 1976 it was at once evident that here was an exceedingly valuable and important tool for use in the study of the so-called Pseudepigrapha. The heart of the work consisted of a bibliography, identifying and listing over 100 documents (so p21), either Jewish or Jewish-Christian, from the period 200 BC to AD 200. One humble benefit to be derived from such a bibliography immediately suggested itself: scholars like me (if there are any) who could never remember for long at a time which Esdras was which,

whether indeed 4 Ezra was really 4 Ezra or an alias for 2 Esdras, 2 Ezra, or 4 Esdras, could now discover with ease their true identities, along with the identity and contents of so many of other works hitherto unheard of, set out with admirable efficiency and clarity. But of course the book served higher purposes than this. Each work listed in the main bibliography was supplied with an introduction, which in the case of less known works like, for instance, 5 Maccabees, or The Apocalypse of Sedrach, extended to two or three pages, and which summarized the views held on the work in question by different scholars. Even after each introduction there were listed all the scholarly articles and books published on the work from 1960 to 1975, excluding only those listed in Delling's Bibliographie, which had attempted to cover the period up to 1965 (and even these have now been included in the supplement). In addition to all this, numerous other articles and books on general or special themes relevant to the Pseudepigrapha were listed under fourteen different heads such as, for example, the Pseudepigrapha and the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the NT, and Gnosticism, Dualism, Messianism, Eschatology, Resurrection and Eschatology, and Sin. In sum, this bibliographical report, as its author called it (p15), is obviously going to be not only a very valuable aid to scholars working in neighbouring disciplines, but an indispensable tool for specialists in Pseudepigraphical studies as well.

Now this excellent volume has been brought up to date in its second edition which includes all the publications on the Pseudepigrapha known to the author from 1960 to the spring of 1979. This second edition adds a few more pseudepigrapha to the list, and among the sections dealing with related topics includes an additional one on The Pseudepigrapha and the NT. Something of the extent of the ever increasing interest in the Pseudepigrapha is shown by the fact that the new edition, appearing only three years after the first, contains an additional 264 names in all its list of scholars who have published works in this field. Prominent amid all this scholarly activity and singled out for special mention is pleasant to see the work of Ireland's M. McNamara.

At several places in the book (ppvii, 17-26) Charlesworth frankly expresses his own unease, and that of other scholars,



at the unsatisfactoriness of the term Pseudepigrapha as a general classification for these numerous and diverse Jewish works coming from no less than four centuries. Charlesworth uses the term simply because at the moment none better has been invented; but the present reviewer would add his voice to the general chorus of unease. In the scheme which Charlesworth tentatively advances (p22; he has a better idea on p25 n26) the Fragments of the Historical Works and the Fragments of the Poetical Works are classified as Pseudepigrapha of the Third Degree, i.e. works which might be included under the title, Pseudepigrapha (p21). But the work of the chronographer Demetrius, which appears among the Fragments of the Historical Works, can surely not be styled pseudepigraphical by any stretch of imagination or category. Demetrius was, according to his lights, a sober historian and critic whose scholarly work on the OT resembles the work on Homer and other Greek scholars of the Mouseion in Alexandria, at least by those of the second rank. Like Sosibius, nicknamed 'ho Lytikos', who was famed for his skill in solving Homeric problems, Demetrius attempted not only to write a history of his people down to his own time but also to use chronology and any other scholarly resource he had, to solve difficulties in the OT. From one of his surviving fragments (Jacoby, Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker, Dritter Teil C, p670, 5: note his 'epizētein de tina') it would appear that he may have run a seminar, or even a school, of biblical criticism. It would startle classicists to find the works of Demetrius' ancient Greek counterparts, like Sosibius, classified as Pseudepigrapha, as no doubt it would startle OT scholars to find the works of his modern counterparts, like, say, S.R. Driver, listed under the same head. Similarly Ezekial, the Playwright's drama, the Exagōgē, based on the Exodus, cannot fairly be called pseudepigraphical any more than Dorothy Sayers' The Man Born to be King could be. Neither Demetrius' work nor Ezekial's professes to be by an author other than its real author. Neither meets the third of Charlesworth's criteria (p21) for a pseudepigraphon, namely that it should claim to be inspired.

Come to that, no more does the famous work, the so-called Letter of Aristeeas, anywhere claim to be inspired either, although Charlesworth continues the long

established tradition of including it among the 'Pseudepigrapha' of the first rank. Pseudepigraphical it is, of course, in the sense that the author adopts the fictional pose of a Greek, when he is in fact a Jew. But that device is a rather special kind of pseudepigraphy. As M. Hadas has pointed out in his edition of that work (pp57-58), 'Ps.-Aristeas' so-called Letter, is not a letter (never in fact claims to be) but is rather an example of a well known, and, in the ancient Greek world, well understood type of literature, a plasma, that is "an imaginative treatment of history which should however preserve historical verisimilitude and present higher 'poetical' truth". That is an altogether different kind of work from a religious tract or treatise that professes to be the inspired words of an ancient, biblical prophet. The whole point of creating the fictional Greek character, Aristeas, was that his story would carry the more weight for his not being Jewish, let alone inspired.

If, then, after the establishment of a sound text, the correct classification of a work's literary type is the foundation of scientific literary criticism, the assigning of ancient works to wrong general literary categories can in the end only impede our true understanding of them. Let us hope that if one general title is in fact necessary (which may be doubted) to cover all these works of such diverse character, someone may soon be able to think up a more satisfactory and appropriate one. The present reviewer confesses he cannot.

None of this, however, detracts from the gratitude which all scholars must feel for the immense amount of labour which James Charlesworth and his team have put into the creation and updating of this volume and for the splendid tool that they have thereby put into our hands.

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D.W. Gooding.

R.S. Bagnall and P. Derow, Greek Historical Documents : the Hellenistic Period (SBL sources for Biblical Study, 16), Scholars Press for SBL, 1981. ppxviii+ 270 np

Documentary collections of this kind are rapidly becoming a genre of their own in the scholarly world, and this well-produced volume fills a gap with 146 inscriptions and papyrus texts from 336-30 BC. Each text is presented in English translation, with a brief introduction and with minor explanatory annotations. There is a very useful appendix on Ptolemaic administration, a set of tables and charts, and a glossary and index of Greek terms. Regrettably, there is no bibliography, though the text contains references to the more important books and articles.

The book is designed as a companion to C.B. Welles' Alexander and the Hellenistic World (Toronto 1970: unfortunately inaccessible to me), and despite its inclusion in a series entitled 'Sources for Biblical Study' it was clearly intended for students whose interest in the hellenistic world was not limited to the Levant. All the more reason for the biblical student to use this source book that he may grasp something of the internationalism of the hellenistic world. Particularly valuable, however, are the sections treating Ptolemaic Egypt and its administration. The selection from the Zenon papyri is most welcome to take just one example, the deed of sale of a slave girl (no.120) throws most interesting light on the cosmopolitan group of people who could be found involved in the affairs of a country estate in Ammanitis.

However, it must also be said that there are not many entries which have a direct bearing on matters of biblical history. One might note no.17 (the defeat of the Gauls in Greece; compare the reference to the Galatians in 2 Macc. 8.20), no.24 (Berenike's journey to Syria; cf. Dan. 11.6) and nos 26 and 27 on the Third Syrian War (cf. Dan. 11.7f) No.54 gives two letters from the Zenon papyri by Toubias, and no.53 gives a royal ordinance about the registration of slaves in Syria and Palestine. A reference here might have been in order to the suggested relationship between this decree and that in the Letter of Aristeas 22f. (cf. W.L. Westermann, "Enslaved persons who are free", AJP 59 (1938), 1-30). The student of Jewish history would have



been happy to see the inclusion of more papyri relating to Jewish affairs; for a useful select index, see M. Hengel, Judaism and Hellenism, II, 287ff.

This book is well laid-out and produced, and well proof-read; film-setting produces its own brand of errors, however, and on a number of occasions the text has been corrected in a point or two too small. The translations convey well enough the bureaucratic style of most of the documents; I was going to complain of "behooves" until I heard it used the other day by a trades-union official in a radio interview!

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J.R. Bartlett

F.W. Beare, The Gospel According to Matthew (Blackwell, Oxford, 1981), 550pp £25

For many years we have been hoping that someone would write a major commentary in English on the Greek text of Matthew's Gospel to satisfy the scholarly need, supplied in his generation by the great work of A.H.McNeile. We shall have to wait some considerable time for the new ICC on Matthew and also J.D.Kingsbury's contribution to the excellent Hermeia series. But now, sixty-six years after McNeile (1915) we have been given a 550-page commentary by F.W.Beare of Toronto, a scholar well-known for his fine work on 1 Peter and for useful books on Philippians and on gospel tradition about Jesus. This new volume is, according to the author, "an independent study of the Gospel according to Matthew, pursued unremittingly over a period of fifteen years" and its aim is not to analyse Matthew's sources or investigate the preliterate forms and transmission of his material, but "to bring out the significance of Matthew as an evangelist, an author, even in some sense a theologian, and so to look upon his work in its totality", while taking into account the many significant studies that have been produced by two generations of interpreters. High expectations are raised by the preface to this handsome book: alas, they

are not met.

The Introduction - which is surprisingly short, one-tenth of the whole volume - restates, to a large extent, and without any fresh supporting arguments, positions that have been familiar for at least twenty years. Thus the Gospel was written (by whom we do not know) possibly in Antioch (or Phoenicia) around the turn of the first century, more particularly in a predominantly Jewish environment where contact and conflict between church and synagogue was continuing. It was written, not to give exact historical information, but to provide practical guidance for Christians of Matthew's own time and their leaders, i.e. as a manual of instruction on the Christian way of life. The so-called "five-book" divisions seem to be, at least, structurally significant and perhaps even point to a new Pentateuch conception on the part of the author. The Matthaean narrative is no more than a retelling of that of Mark. The discourse material - which emerges from Matthew's hands in the form of "systematic presentations of the mind of Christ on matters of great moment to his Church" (a quotation from T.W. Manson) in which we cannot distinguish Jesus' authentic teaching from what has been contributed by the transmitting church and what is due to Matthew as an interpreter - ultimately derives from Q, though it is admitted that this symbol may represent a number of sources. That, surely, is all pretty routine and rather old-fashioned. Perhaps the section on "The Teaching of the Evangelist" will come alive and reveal Beare's "independent study". In fact, it turns out to be a descriptive sketch of the major themes and emphases in Matthew's teaching. There is no attempt at real engagement with the issues lying behind (and even on the surface!) of that teaching, not even on the subject of "law". There is no presentation of Matthew's theological standpoint on any single issue or as a coherent whole. But that is supposed to be the major interest of this commentary! One actually reads the following statement: "There is little formal teaching on the Person of Christ in Matthew" (p41). There is, of course, no reference to Kingsbury's work which went to make up his book entitled Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom. Can Beare's avowedly redaction-critical commentary afford to be so independent?

But maybe the few pages on "The Question of Sources" will be less superficial. The two-document solution is affirmed. The neo-Griesbach theory and the complicated ideas of Schmiedel are briefly outlined and rejected, and then we are told (as if one scholar's view was absolutely authoritative) that "nearly all scholars would agree with Philipp Vielhauer that 'there is no alternative to it (The Two-Document Hypothesis) worth mentioning, even though other theories are not wanting' ". That is still superficial, but even worse, it is supercilious. Nothing is believed by that kind of statement.

Well, that is what Beare's Introduction offers. In my view it does not deal adequately with any of the problems of the Matthean Introduction which exercise the minds of other Matthean scholars and which do find mention, if not solution, in their much shorter books (which Beare claims to have taken into account). Here traditional positions are reaffirmed, but seldom even updated. New approaches (e.g. to the Synoptic problem) are either not faced or hastily dismissed. For whom is such an Introduction intended? A scholar and teacher will find almost nothing to interest him here.

Turning to the Commentary - and obviously I have to be objective - the assessment of this reader remains the same. The Birth Stories (Chs 1-2) are discussed quite interestingly without any reference to Raymond Brown's splendid work on their traditions, historicity and interpretation, and without any reference to their possible midrashic character. In the birth stories, we are simply told, "are developed to provide a setting for an oracle or citation". Yet in the comments on Matthew 2-2 there is no mention of Num 24.17, which is the clue to understanding them. As to the well-known crux presented by ὄρατος (2.23), we are informed that the philological difficulties are dealt with by G.F. Moore (in 1920) and Alf Schlatter (in 1929) - but we are not even told what the solution was! Where is account taken of Gerhardsson's study of this word, and where is the evidence of consideration of the competing explanations of the significance of this peculiar adjectival form? Beare's stated aim of giving Matthew "at face value", so to speak, will not reasonably permit deficiencies of the kind and on the scale indicated.



Throughout the commentary there is great scepticism about the Gospel's historical value and about our ability to know anything about Jesus' self-awareness. The temptations are not messianic. On the contrary, "the debate is a literary device for expounding the nature of the perils that beset the soul, and the way in which they are to be surmounted". (Incidentally, the observations on Matthew's use of proserchomai on p108 are illuminating) The Beatitudes present the risen Lord addressing Matthew's church (p135), and so there is no interest in their underlying Aramaic (poetical) form and possible historicity, but perhaps that is precluded by reason of the author's aim. The very important passage, Matt 5.17-20, receives extremely cursory treatment which reveals no indebtedness to recent, valuable discussion. There is no indication of the possible meanings advocated for porneia in 5.32; epiousios in the Lord's Prayer is interpreted (in the sense given in the Peshitta) as "sufficient". And that very strange saying in 8.22, "Let the dead bury their dead" is explained as "Let the matter take care of itself". At 10.5-6 (the beginning of the missionary discourse) Beare rejects the genuineness of the prohibition (it is the deliverance of a Christian prophet) but he has not a word to say on the arguments of Jeremias about its language and authenticity. The story of the Canaanite woman is then "a retrojection into the life of Jesus of the controversy over the propriety of extending the Christian mission beyond Israel" (p342). The approach to parables is solely in terms of seeking their function for the evangelist. What they may possibly have meant when first spoken or when interpreted in the earliest communities is not Beare's concern, which may explain - though it certainly does not justify - his complete omission of all the rich insights provided by recent approaches to parable-study. How far can "independent study" go and remain worthwhile? A final quotation from the comment on 16.28 (citing Vielhauer again): "It is far from certain that Jesus made use of the Son of man imagery in any sense". Is it really as simple as that? What has all the Son-of-man Forschung been about?

It is to my shame that I stopped reading this comment-

at the end of Matt 18. Not because it is hard to read, it is not, but because it is dull and dated. It is interesting to note that the authors most often referred to Bultmann, Dodd, T.W.Manson and W.D.Davies' The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount (1964). That fact does not make it a bad one. Far from it. But it does indicate that one has not faced the issues raised in Matthaean studies (even in Gospel study) in recent years. They cannot all be dismissed without comment. Or is that what fifteen years of "independent study" entails and produces? I am at a loss to know for whom this commentary was intended. The publisher's blurb speaks of it as being "readily intelligible to the interested amateur", but the author's preface gives the hint that he intended his work for that audience (though even "amateurs" will be better served by one or other of the shorter and cheaper commentaries available).

Serious students of Matthew will find very little of real value here. Though beautifully produced, there is not £25 worth of investigative and up-to-date comment and argument. I am very surprised that the publisher's readers allowed this book to go forward for it will damage the author's reputation, and that is sad. It is also sad that an opportunity to fill a great gap has been missed. We are all waiting for a replacement for McNeile's thorough and comprehensive study of Matthew's Gospel.

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David Hill

Anna Dewey, Markan Public Debate (Mark 2.1-3.6)

SBL Dissertation Series, Scholars Press 1980

ppxii + 277 \$7.50

This is a painstaking examination of Mark's literary technique in Mark 2.1-3.6. It demonstrates that the complex of five conflict stories is symmetrically arranged. The first and last are debates between Jesus and his opponents set within the framework of the healing miracles. The call of Levi has parallels with the plucking of the ears of corn on the Sabbath. The central pericope differs from the others in structure and in the absence of "hook words", yet it is linked with each of them.

The author agrees with Taylor that the style of this complex is thoroughly Markan, but, unlike Taylor, she



concludes with good reason that the plot against the life of Jesus in Mark 3.6 is not anachronistic. Against Bultmann and others she does not regard the healing of the paralytic as a simple healing miracle into which has been inserted a justification for the Church's forgiveness of sins but, on the contrary, claims that the pericope is a literary unity.

It is argued, "The rhetorical structure of 2.1-3.6 is indeed elegant, showing the hand of a redactor skilled in structuring, interrelating, and developing his material. Both the linear pattern, the introduction of motifs in 2.1-12, their development in the succeeding pericopes and climax in 3.1-6, and the elaborate concentric and chiasmic pattern of 2.1-3.6 reveal the work of a redactor skilled in the art of narrative."

One of the most valuable sections of this investigation is the excursus on the Son of Man in 2.10 and 2.28. The sayings in which the title occurs break the literary symmetry of the whole section, but such asymmetry is not unusual in ancient literature, and serves to emphasize the importance of the asymmetric element. Mark intended this stress which prepared his readers for the later occurrence of the title with their references to the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. The techniques discovered in Mark 2.1-3.6 are sought with less success in Mark 1.1-8, 4.1-34; and in chs 11 and 12.

The reviewer sought for them in the collection of miracles stories beginning with 4.35. Since 2.1-3.6 contains two miracles, it seems not unreasonable to suppose that the techniques used so effectively there would be used in the miracle collection. But although a number of phrases such as εἰς τὸ πέραν and καὶ παρακαλεῖ αὐτόν can be shown to recur there is no discernible symmetry such as the author has shown in 2.1-3.6.

It is possible that the sophisticated techniques used to bind together in subtle inter-relations the five conflict stories are only used sparingly in other sections of dialogue, and not at all in miracle stories, but this seems unlikely.

It may be as the author points out, "Rhetorical analysis is an art as well as a science. It depends not only on



the evidence of the text and the skill of the rhetorical critic in analyzing the text, but also on the sensitivity of the critic to the text.....Rhetorical criticism, like redaction and form criticism is not an exact science." Perhaps a more careful and sensitive examination of the miracle stories will disclose the hidden patterns.

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V. Parkin

Klaus Bockmuehl, The Challenge of Marxism

Inter-Varsity Press, 1981    £1.95

The author distinguishes carefully between Marxism and Socialism and Communism, and argues that Marxism can be regarded as a secularized vision (version?) of the Kingdom of God. He shows how Feuerbach's reduction of the Christian idea of God to a projection of man's own attributes led to Marx's statement that "the more man puts into God the less he retains in himself", and to the belief that the destruction of religion was the necessary first step in the emancipation of society.

Bockmuehl traces the development from Feuerbach's theoretical revolution through Marx to Lenin, already a revolutionary before encountering Marxist thought, who taught that one must will the revolution which will give supreme power to the proletariat, saying, "Anything is moral which serves the destruction of the old exploiters' society, and the alliance of all working people around the proletariat which builds the new, the communist society."

The principle of expediency governs the relationship of a communist state with states where there has not yet been a communist revolution, but within the communist state itself there are standards of morality not unlike those of bourgeois society. Apparently the new morality (new, that is, to communists) was believed to have come into existence spontaneously with the 1917 revolution.

It is easy enough to show from, for example, the records of Stalin's time, that the "new men" of the post-revolutionary years are just as immoral as the old men, but

Bockmuehl does not dismiss communism so lightly. He shows that it challenges the timelessness of much Christian teaching with its strong sense of history, and with its insistence upon putting faith into practice. This challenge remains also when one has exposed the inadequacy of Marx's views of the origin and development of Christianity. So Bockmuehl quotes a friend working among Christian students, who wrote, "My deep concern is the fact that for the most of our Christian students faith and conversion seem to be a matter of emotions, but not of a real change in the decisive questions of life. This is the reason for their lack of availability for our task in the universities. Much of their Christianity is indeed an "opiate", sometimes even the singing. This will be my main battle - not to be content with anything less than their individually making their lives available to God, including their jobs, friendships, and marriage. Here am I, Lord, send Thou me!"

On p153 we are told that the position of David F. Strauss who espoused Darwinism "but nevertheless asked for an ethos of tolerance and love of neighbour" was exposed as sheer nonsense by "the clever young philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche." "The result of Darwin's theory of evolution could only be the fight of each person against the other, the rule of the jungle and the survival of the fittest." Clearly the criticism by "a clever young philosopher" is regarded as sound. But any who take the advice of Proverbs 6.6 and consider the co-operation within a colony of ants will be less confident that Darwinism cannot be reconciled with "brotherliness and solidarity".

The book is short, readable, and useful. The notes contain much that is of value.

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